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ABSTRACT

Japanese students returning from time spent abroad face a public school system in which little attention is given to maintenance of a second language, and reassimilation into the Japanese culture is heavily stressed. There may be several reasons for this attitude: (1) knowledge of a second language gives too much advantage to an already advantaged social group; (2) second language maintenance is a personal and not a public educational problem; (3) a second language is of little practical use in the all-important school examinations; and (4) high proficiency in Japanese is a foremost objective, while proficiency in a foreign language is of distinctly minor importance and possession of a "second language" could be actually detrimental to one's acceptance as a true Japanese. Historical intolerance for languages other than Japanese and insistence on cultural assimilation persists despite the changed social, political, and economic situation of modern Japan. Current public education should be revised to include maintenance and enhancement of students' international outlook and second language capabilities and to allow the children of foreign workers into the public school system. (MSE)

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Second Language Maintenance for Returnee Students in Japan

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Abstract

In Japanese public schools, the maintenance of second language of the returnee students is receiving very little attention while the adaptation to Japanese school curriculum and school life is forcefully carried out. The present study endeavors to gain insight into the problem by going back to the language policy adopted during the colonization of Taiwan and Korea, and further back to monolingual sentiment cultivated in history. The contention of the paper is that linguistic diversity of the present Japanese school population and the prospect of increasing number of students with diverse linguistic background necessitate the breakthrough from the old sentiment and the initiation of language maintenance courses in the public schools.

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Second Language Maintenance for Returnee Students in Japan

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Japan, there is no language program in the public school aimed specifically at the maintenance of the second language of students who have lived abroad for several years and have gained high proficiency in the language of the country. Consequently, many of the returnee students, especially the elementary school level children, lose their native-like proficiency within a year of their return. The present study is to investigate why the maintenance of second language of the returnee students is receiving so little attention while the adaptation to Japanese school curriculum and school life is forcefully carried out. The study will show that the strong demand for returnee students to assimilate back to Japanese society is rooted in the faith in ethnic and linguistic homogeneity which has been cultivated through Japanese history.

However, this linguistic homogeneity is being challenged today by the increase in number of bilingual returnees who speak language other than Japanese just as well or even better than Japanese. There are also returnees from the People's Republic of China, the Southeast Asian refugees, and foreign residents working for global enterprises. Japanese public school system has not responded to the diverse

linguistic needs of these children. There is no doubt that the Japanese language program for these people should receive attention. However, at the same time, initiation of the maintenance program of the languages other than Japanese should not be overlooked.

The present paper consists of five sections. First, an overview of the present situation of the second language of returnee students is given. Then the reasons behind the lack of enthusiasm for the maintenance of the second language in the public schools are sought. Third, examples of language education being utilized as a powerful force for assimilation are taken from the colonization of Taiwan and the treatment of Koreans in Japan. Fourth, the explanation for the strong demand for assimilation is offered from the point of view of national sentiment on linguistic homogeneity. Fifth, maintenance program of the returnee's second language is presented as a step in creating competent bilinguals as well as allowing linguistic and cultural diversity in Japanese society.

2. PLIGHT OF THE RETURNEE'S SECOND LANGUAGE

The overseas Japanese children who attend the native schools study hard to acquire the language of the country in which they stay, and many of them attain a higher or comparable level of proficiency in the second language as in Japanese (Minoura 207-16; Commins and Nakajima 141-80). This cuases problems when they enter Japanese schools back in Japan, for any language other than Japanese is considered to be "foreign and illegitimate". A child who functions in a foreign language better than in Japanese needs to catch up with the Japanese language fast or else he will be

considered as a non-Japanese.

insert Table 1, Figure 1, Table 2 here

Some of the schools with quota for accepting the returnees which are refered to as Ukeirekou, have special adaptation courses for them. Some give extra courses to students whose academic performance is not up to par with the average Japanese students (Tokyo Gakugei University, Overseas Student Education Center 1986, 84-90). Because of the relatively high academic standard of Japanese schools and also due to different curriculum organization compared with foreign schools, returnees are known to be behind in almost all the Japanese school subjects. The basic problem is their weakness in the Japanese language; Kanji, composition, and reading comprehension. The teachers assigned to handle returnee students are mainly concerned with the adaptation to school life and Japanese language problems of these students. They are certified teachers capable of conducting regular classes but have no intercultural counseling training. Therefore, many of them have a hard time understanding the educational as well as the psychological issues involved in cultural and linguistic encounters.

insert Table 3 here

Thus, it is clear that the purpose of the Ukeirekou at present is to enhance adaptation back to Japanese school life and school curriculum. Though, educators have repeatedly expressed that experience of living in a different culture and the knowledge and ability to use a foreign language are valuable assets, they have failed to provide a positive measure to maintain and build upon them in the schools where the returnees are accepted (Ministry of Education 1986, 121).

Very often, in the elementary schools, the teachers advise the young returnees to concentrate on the

acquisition of Japanese and not regret the fact that the second language is lost. The classmates often make fun of returnees who speak Japanese with a foreign accent. Some of them go to the extreme of bullying them and make the life of the returnees miserable. Many returnees confess that they find adaptation to Japanese society more difficult than the adaptation to the foreign country (Hoshino 223-8; Niekawa 181-242).

Most of the returnees hide the fact that they lived abroad to avoid unnecessary pressure. As for language problems, there are at least three types of reaction to the hostile linguistic environment (Yashiro 1987b, 35-57). Some secretly work hard outside school to maintain their second language. Some hyper-react by developing a strong negative feeling towards their second lanuage and make an effort to forget it. A majority of the returnees lose their proficiency in their second language because they are just too occupied trying to keep up with the classwork or preparing for entrance examination to upper schools. Since English is taught from junior high school on, those returnees whose second language is English have an advantage over others whose second lanuage is not English, for they are spared from forgeting it altogether and at the same time use it to their benefit in school work.

3. REASONS FOR THE LACK OF INTEREST IN MAINTENANCE OF THE SECOND LANGUAGE

The following reasons can be given for the lack of interest in maintenance of the second language in the public schools in Japan. Teachers often say that maintenance of second lnaguage gives advantage to the

already socially advantaged group of students, which is against the basic public educational principle, equal education to all. Therefore, the teachers advocate a general amelioration of English curriculum and teaching aids, and the employment of native speakers of English as assistants in conversation classes, but reject the idea of offering proficiency oriented courses with curriculum adjustment which will enable the incorporation of returnees' second language maintenance program, fearing that that would mean segregating the students according to their ability. In the same line, they argue that the maintenance of a second language is a personal problem which each individual should solve on his own, but not a problem the public educational institution is obligated to handle.

Some candid and practical minded teachers say that the second language of the returnees is not useful for entrance examinations to higher schools which stress spelling, grammar, and translation. What the returnees should do is not so much maintain their second language proficiency but to brush up on their Japanese so that they can get higher scores in grammar and translation.

The most deep rooted and prevalent argument is that in the monolingual Japanese society, the most important thing is to have high proficiency in Japanese, and only after acquiring satisfactory Japanese ability should one venture into a foreign language; a foreign language not a second language. It is hard for Japanese people to conceive of a Japanese equally capable of multipule languages. Such a person is looked upon with suspicion as being abnormal. Only several years ago, some teachers of Ukeirekou were refering to returnees as their patients.

It is extremely uncomfortable for a Japanese to live in Japan if he is not accepted into the community. Teachers being aware of this fact require returnees to adapt to the Japanese way of life, acquire the right manner, have the appropriate disposition as a Japanese student, use Japanese language properly, read and write the required number of Kanji, etc. Since second language seems to stand in the way of being Japanese, it is detrimental in gaining re-admittance to Japanese society. The problem is that the returnees have to throw away not only their second lanuage but also some part of their personality to fit back into the rigid model set by Japanese society.

4. TEACHING OF JAPANESE UTILIZED FOR ASSIMILATION

In the past, intolerance to languages other than Japanese was extended to non-Japanese living in acquired territories. Teaching of Japanese was considered to be the most important policy in the colonization of Taiwan and Korea (Suenaga 90-6). The justification behind the prohibition of native tongue and promotion of Japanese in newly established co-educational compulsory public elementary schools in colonized areas was that the people were Japanese subjects. Therefore, they were forced to cast aside their ethnic identity and become Japanese. They were to use Japanese as their language and pledge loyalty to Japanese ideals.

According to the Japanese propaganda, teaching of Japanese language and Japanese spirit was righteous, since Japan considered the Taiwanese and Koreans as equal subjects of the Emperor. However, in reality there was discrimination in all phase of life. Schools

were segregated for natives and Japanese. It was extremely hard for the natives to go beyond elementary school. Natives were educated as manual laborers while the Japanese were educated for managerial positions in government and industries.

The offsprings of the Koreans who were brought to Japan for hard labor during the Second World War were subjected to the assimilation policy as the teaching of Korean and Korean culture was prohibited in Japanese public schools, except for a short period right after 1945 (Nakajima 313-21). Unfortunately, this policy was not ameliorated by the Japan Korean Treaty of 1965. Today, Korean assimilation has progressed to the extent that there are many Korean youth who cannot speak Korean and who do not identify themselves as Koreans. However, as in many assimilation cases, cultural assimilation did not accompany equal educational and employment opportunities.

5. DEMAND FOR ASSIMILATION

Why does Japan demand such a high level of linguistic assimilation from people who come under Japanese rule? In a modern industrial state, a strong national language or a dominant common language is believed to be the foundation of national unity and power (Tanaka 121-34). In the case of Japan, the nature of the belief in Japanese as one and only language is more profound. It is like faith. As the race is pure and ancient the language is equally pure and inseparable from the people. Many still believe that the spirit of the Japanese people abides in the Japanese language. This kind of idea is not

particularly limited to Japan. However, Japan is unique in a sense since this idea of the purity and unity of Japanses people and language was never really challenged by invasion or rule by a foreign power. Thus, the Japanese were led to believe that this purity and unity were natural, right and superior.

This sentiment of righteousness and superiority was extended to acquired territories. There seemed to have been no discussion on social and economic advantage of ruling Taiwan and Korea through a small number of go-betweens in exploiting the labor of the natives, as most of the European colonists have done. Based upon the above sentiment and also due to the lack of experience in multilingual societies and in ruling another nation, Japan naively forced the monolingual policy in Taiwan, Korea, and other Southeast Asian territories which came under Japanese rule.

With the defeat in the Second World War, Japan was stripped to her four main islands and monolingual colonial policy came to a halt. However, within the Japanese mainland, the idea that Japanese people and Japanese language are inseparable persisted. Japanese were not going to let the Americans do what they did in the Philippines. Though English did became near compulsory subject since it was to be offered at all the junior high schools, it was a foreign language.

6. NECESSITY OF THE MAINTENANCE OF SECOND LANGUAGE

Post war economic development in Japan depended largely on foreign trade. As more and more business people were sent abroad, the number of returnee students increased. In 1985, the number of elementary school to senior high school level returning students

exceeded ten thousand. Today, even the factories of small and medium size enterprises are moving overseas. The returnee population is not only increasing in number but also losing its elitistic nature. This means that many of the offsprings of average citizens who were sent abroad are returning as (semi)bilinguals. This kind of returnees are not the only bilinguals living in Japan now. There are Chinese and Japanese bilinguals, Vietnamese and Japanese bilinguals, and there are Korean and Japanese bilinguals whom the schools have ignored for so long. Though some of these people are not of Japanese nationality, they will be living in Japan for all of their lives. Therefore, the educational system should respond to their linguistic diversity with positive measures.

Old sentiments die hard. Though the social condition is changing inside and outside Japan, people's belief that Japanese is the one and only language for Japanese people still seems to have force. However, strongly self-preservative nature of an over homogeneous society causes undesirable conflicts and stifles and wastes valuable human assets.

Today, Japan's existance depends on the friendly relation with the people of the world and interdependence is a fact of life. There are approximately five hundred thousand Japanese living abroad and over eight hundred thousand foreigers living in Japan if we count the Koreans. Faced with the increase of returnees and also foreigners working in Japan, Japan can no longer ignore the presence of linguistic diversity within its shore.

The present education for returnee students aimed at the adaptation back to Japanese school curriculum and

school life needs to be revised to incorporate the process of maintenance and enhancement of the international outlook and the second language ability of these students. Moreover, consideration should be given to measures for accepting the offsprings of foreign workers into the public school system. In this connection New International School whose student body is to consist of regular Japanese students, returnees, and children of foreign residents proposed by the Special Committee on Education appointed by the Prime Minister in 1985 is a step in the right direction (Rinji Kyouiku Singikai 35). However, it is regretable that the Ministry of Education has ignored this proposal in its paper on enhancement of educational reform in December 1987.

The Special Committee on Education did not specify the linguistic program to be carried out in the New Internationl School. However, it is predictable that Japanese as a second language as well as other languages as a first or second language will have to be accounted for. The New International School will be a preferable place for the returnees and foreign students. However, creation of one or two public international schools is not going to solve their problems, for they are increasing in number and scattered over numerous cities in Japan.

Table 4 here

To reach many returnees, it is far more practical to start a second language maintenance program in the schools they are accepted or a center school in the district. The maintenance class should function not only for maintenance but also for enhancement of the returnees' second language. For example, in Nagatachou Elementary School in Tokyo, there are approximately 30

returnee students. 90% of the returnees' second language is English. These students can be divided into three to four groups according to their English proficiency level to receive language guidance from a qualified English-Japanese bilingual teacher or a qualified native speaker of English.

With the globalization of Japanese economy, there is no doubt that bilinguals with world outlook equipped with specialized knowledge will be in demand. This kind of high quality human resource cannot be nurtured in a mass educational system under an uniform guidance.

Educating bilinguals in Japanese schools will have far reaching implications, for it will mean that Japan has taken a positive move towards breaking the social rigidity based upon the sentiment, one people one language, inseparable. Returnee students will no longer be forced to fit into a pre-made model. They will gain the right to be both Japanese and themselves. Returnees are not the only people who will benefit from this change in the social attitude. The returnees from People's Republic of China, Koreans, Southeast Asian refugees, and foreign residents will also benefit from the change. However, the greatest beneficiary will be the Japanese people at large, for their society and culture will be enriched by incorporation of diversity, and at the same time better accepted by the people of the world.

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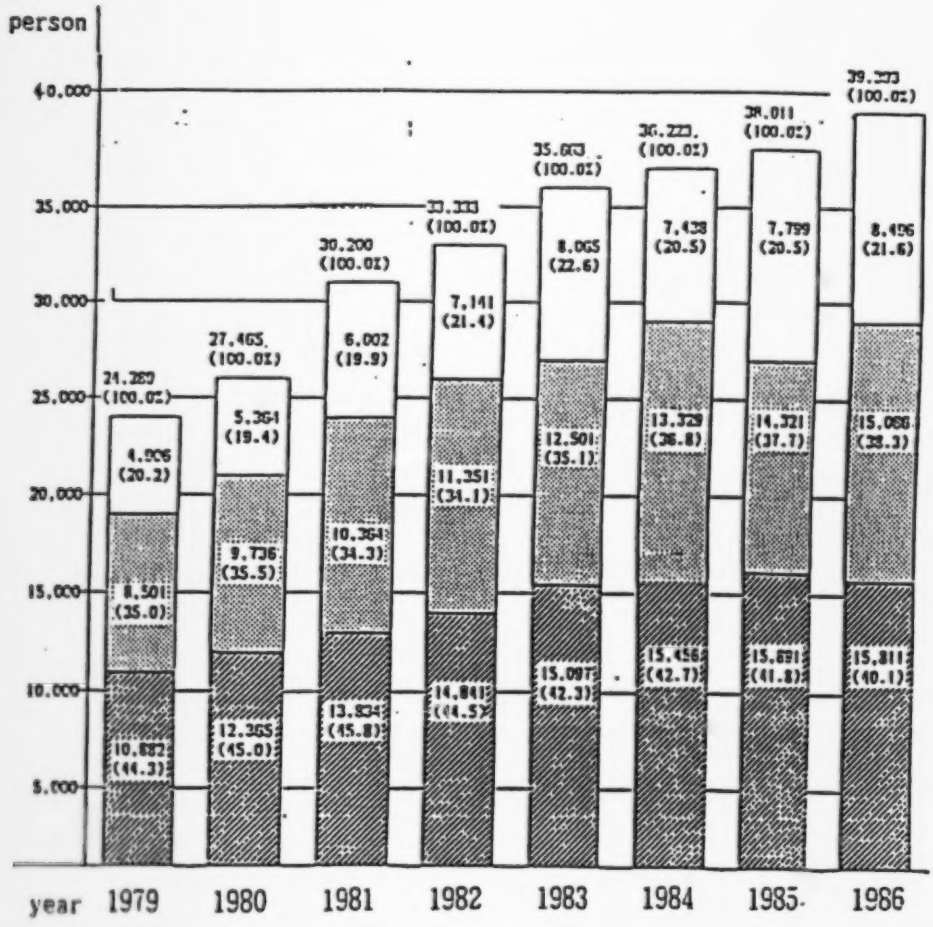
Table 1

Number of Overseas Students and the Types of School Attended



(Source: Ministry of Education, Kaigaishijo Kyoiku no Genjyo, Jan. 1987.)

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Table 2

The Number of *Kikokushijo*

Year	Total	Elementary School	Junior High School	Senior High School
1978	6,518	4,545	1,301	672
1979	6,564	4,563	1,420	581
1980	7,504	5,137	1,500	867
1981	8,470	5,723	1,874	873
1982	9,563	6,215	2,275	1,073
1983	9,786	6,304	2,258	1,224
1984	(100%) 9,731	(63.4%) 6,170	(23.4%) 2,281	(13.2%) 1,280

(Kikokushijo refers to returnees)

(Source : Ministry of Education, Kaigaisijo Kyoiku no Genjyo, Jan. 1986.)

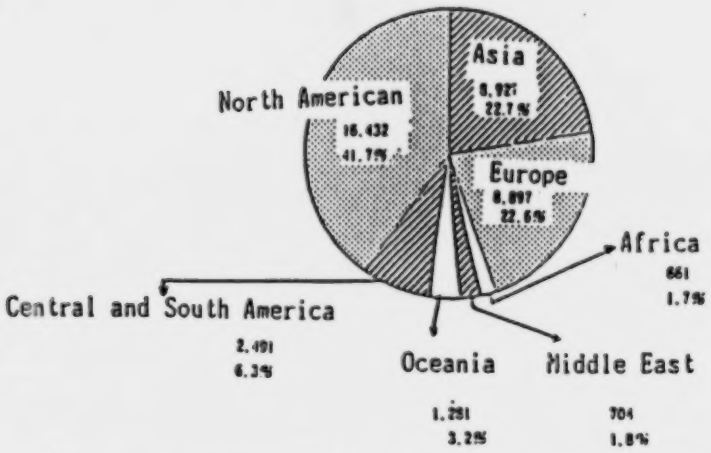
Table 3

The Number of *Ukeirekou*

	Type of School	elementary school		Junior high school		senior high school		Total	
		number of schools	quota for Kikokushijo	number of schools	quota for Kikokushijo	number of schools	quota for Kikokushijo	number of schools	quota for Kikokushijo
National	Kikokushijo Class	6	270	5	225	1	180	12	675
	Integrated Class	1	45	5	225	3	87	9	357
	Subtotal	7	315	10	450	4	267	21	1,032
Municipal and Private	Munincipal and Private Kikokushijo Ukeireko	29	739	22	691	29	2,001	80	3,431
	Kikokushijo Education District School	443	3,426	240	1,595	–	–	683	5,021
	Others	–	–	4	165	10	120	14	285
	Subtotal	472	4,165	266	2,451	39	2,121	777	8,737
	Total	479	4,480	276	2,901	43	2,388	798	9,769

(Source : Ministry of Education, Kaigaishijo Kyoiku no Genjyo, Jan. 1986.)

Figure 1 Location of the Overseas Students (1986)



(Source: Ministry of Education, Kaigaisijo Kyoiku no Genjyo, Jan. 1987.)

Table 4

Location of Returnee Students (1985)

prefecture	number of students	%
Tokyo	3,270	32.1%
Kanagawa	1,715	16.8
Chiba	1,263	12.4
Saitama	566	5.6
Subtotal	6,814	66.9
Kyoto	218	2.1
Osaka	559	5.5
Hyogo	558	5.5
Subtotal	1,335	13.1
Aichi	370	3.6
Others	1,677	16.4
Total	10,196	100.0

(Source: Ministry of Education, Kaigaisijo Kyoiku no Genjyo, Jan. 1987.)